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## **Question Time: Is it time to ban the box?**

**Should job seekers disclose prior criminal convictions on applications**

**By Rob Burgess**  
**Tribune night editor**

[**Editor's note:** To participate in future queries, keep an eye on our Twitter and Facebook accounts.]

Last month, Republican Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal signed an executive order which bars job seekers from being forced to disclose prior criminal convictions on their initial applications.

"The initiative was recommended by Deal's criminal justice reform council in January 2014," reported Greg Bluestein of The Atlanta Journal Constitution on Feb. 24. "The council's report said it was a barrier to employment that could exclude released inmates from consideration even if they are qualified for the job and the conviction has no bearing on the work. It urged instead a requirement that the applicant disclose any criminal history during a face-to-face interview with the hiring agent."

There are now 14 states and dozens of municipalities, including Indianapolis, which have agreed to "ban the box." So, we wanted to know: "Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?"

## **Your answers**

“I think the key word is ‘initial.’ Felony convictions are a tremendous barrier to employment for those re-entering society. However, I think employers have a right to know the complete background of an applicant.”

— **Merle Tosche**

“I really like this idea. I, myself, have been denied jobs over a criminal history. I thought I served my time and paid my dues and fees? Guess not. People with criminal backgrounds are treated like second-class citizens. People want you to serve the time, but still punish you the rest of your life. Hard to get ahead and build a better life if you can't get a decent job because of one stupid mistake you made years ago. I want to say that my convictions are nonviolent, non-drug-related, non-sex-crime. Now, I can understand not hiring a convicted murderer, rapist, child molester. The system was designed for people to fail. You get arrested, go to jail, get out, put on probation/in-home. Then, you get hit with all these fees for the probation/in-home that some average \$12 a day. Then, you go to get a job, to not only pay your fees, but try and make and sustain yourself with necessities (rent, food, gas, clothes.) But, oh, wait, you can't get a decent enough job to pay all that because people won't hire someone with a criminal background. Then, you're stuck with people who will turn to illegal ways of making money or not paying at all. Either way, you're going back in. I could go all day on this. I've been through it and seen others go through it.

I can't even get a passport to take my family on a cruise, or go out of the country. Can't get a CDL. I mean, the list goes on. Once you get put in the system once for the littlest infraction your life is ruined from then on." —

**Ryan Calhoun**

"Travel restrictions actually indicate that other countries don't desire visits by convicted criminals. It is entirely unrelated to full disclosure in the first round of a job interview process."— **Sean Webb**

"I think it should be disclosed. However, I agree some of the restrictions can be a little overbearing. But there should be restrictions." — **Michael Ogle**

### **Our answers**

"Maybe we should just add more boxes like 'Yes, but I was tricked into doing it.' Or: 'I was holding it for a friend.' Or, even: 'As God is my witness I thought turkeys could fly.'"— **Steve Mullen**

"The U.S. has such a high imprisonment rate that many people, even after they've served their time, are immediately eliminated from employment consideration due to past crimes. A good hiring manager should be able to discern who the best job candidates are with or without this information. This sounds like a reasonable step in the right direction." — **Patrick Caldwell**

“I don't feel strongly either way. On the one hand, I'm all for giving folks a fair shake if they've reformed after doing their time. Plenty of people do commit one or two criminal acts early in life and go on to become exemplary employees and upstanding members of society. On the other hand, I understand many bosses would be hesitant to entrust certain positions to someone who's been proven to have acted unethically in the past. For them, a criminal record would be a deal-breaker later on in the process, anyway.”

— **Sarah Einselen**

“Absolutely. We have the highest incarceration rate in the entire world. What are these people supposed to do once they get out otherwise? How are they supposed to make a living if they can't find legal work? Politicians always want to talk about jobs, and here's a concrete example of an instance where we could instantly give a boost to the workforce. Now, I can also see the employers' side of this. But, this doesn't stop anyone from doing a background check later. All this does is allow people a foot in the door. Don't they at least deserve that much?” — **Rob Burgess**

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